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Viewing cable 06MANAGUA944, MONTEALEGRE TO DAS MADISON: A VOTE FOR RIZO IS A

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- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
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If you find meaningful or important information in a cable, please link directly to its unique reference number. Linking to a specific paragraph in the body of a cable is also possible by copying the appropriate link (to be found at the paragraph symbol). Please mark messages for social networking services like Twitter with the hash tags **#cablegate** and a hash containing the reference ID e.g. **#06MANAGUA944**.

Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
06MANAGUA944	2006-05-02 14:45	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Managua

Appears in these articles:

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C O N F I D E N T I A L MANAGUA 000944

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DEPT FOR WHA K. MADISON, WHA/CEN, USAID/LAC M. MAGAN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/02/2016
TAGS: [EAID](#) [ECON](#) [EFIN](#) [KDEM](#) [NU](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#)
SUBJECT: MONTEALEGRE TO DAS MADISON: A VOTE FOR RIZO IS A
VOTE FOR ALEMAN . . . AND ORTEGA

Classified By: Ambassador Paul A. Trivelli. Reasons 1.4 (B,D).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Eduardo Montealegre of the National Liberal Alliance (ALN) predicts that at least four presidential candidates will compete in November's presidential race. He told visiting DAS Kirsten Madison, USAID DAA Mike Magan, and Ambassador that ultimately Nicaraguans must vote for or against Sandinista Party (FSLN) candidate Daniel Ortega, and for or against the Aleman-Ortega Pact. He believes that high voter turnout will work in his favor and that Nicaraguan youth will support him. Montealegre suggested the U.S. can best help by supporting vote promotion efforts to encourage high voter turnout and bolster observation to stem fraud. To Montealegre, the fear factor continues to work in Rizo's favor, as most Nicaraguan financiers believe Rizo is a "safer bet" than Montealegre to beat Ortega. He continues negotiations with Jose Antonio Alvarado and may reach an agreement. According to Montealegre, Venezuelan President Chavez's fertilizer, oil, and medical support initiatives are designed to help Ortega win the election, but notes that the fact Chavez has singled him out as Ortega's competition might work in Montealegre's favor. END SUMMARY.

A TWO-ISSUE CAMPAIGN

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¶2. (C) On April 21, Eduardo Montealegre shared with DAS Kirsten Madison, USAID DAA Mike Magan, and Ambassador, his prediction that at four major candidates will compete in November's presidential race. He opined that ultimately, Nicaraguans will be faced with voting for, or against, FSLN candidate Daniel Ortega, and for, or against, the Aleman-Ortega Pact. Montealegre was optimistic that Nicaraguans will be savvy enough to realize that a vote for PLC candidate Jose Rizo is tantamount to voting for PLC leader/convicted money launderer Aleman, and a thus vote for the Pact. In Montealegre's view, his most pressing challenge is convincing voters -- especially anti-Ortega and anti-Aleman independents -- that he is the candidate most able to beat Ortega.

GETTING OUT THE VOTE BEST WAY TO BEAT ORTEGA

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¶3. (C) Montealegre remarked that traditionally high voter turnout has disadvantaged Ortega, while a low turnout favors him. The challenge is to convince independents to vote, as most of these voters are anti-Sandinista. A four-way race, while nerve-wracking, could also play in Montealegre's favor

and against Ortega because if Ortega does not win on the first round (requiring he receive 35% of the voters and lead his nearest competitor by 5%), Ortega is sure to lose in a runoff, unless he were pitted against Rizo (the polls support Montealegre's assertion).

ALEMAN CHOSE RIZO TO APPEASE THE AMERICANS

14. (C) Montealegre believes Aleman chose Rizo because he thought Rizo is the most palatable option for the U.S. government. Similarly, Aleman chose Gilberto Wong to run Rizo's campaign because Wong is a friend of Jeb Bush.

PEOPLE VOTE FOR CANDIDATES -- NOT PARTY MACHINERY

15. (C) Dispelling common concerns that the ALN-PC does not possess the party machinery to compete against Ortega or Rizo, Montealegre argued that people will vote for the candidate, not party machinery. While his alliance already enjoys considerable backing and organizational structure, marketing the candidate and crafting the message pose the real challenges, challenges that require financial backing, asserted Montealegre. Montealegre explained that he will draw on support not only from disaffected PLC members, but also from Nicaragua's sizable independent vote (estimates range from 40% to 50% of the population). And, as the youngest among the presidential candidates, Montealegre will appeal to Nicaraguan youth (about 70% of Nicaraguans are under 30). He predicted that the youth vote, which is more change oriented and less risk adverse, will be a determining factor in November.

PRIMARIES

16. (C) Montealegre, who voiced appreciation for U.S. efforts to support multi-party primaries, lamented that the initiative had not succeeded. With irony, he noted that Rizo contradicted himself by claiming there is no time to hold primaries to select a president, but there is time to hold multi-party primaries to select his VP and departmental deputies.

PLAYING THE U.S. CARD

17. (C) Montealegre ventured that most Nicaraguans are pro-U.S. and expect the U.S. to "twist their arms" on occasion. He suggested the most effective way for the U.S. to lend its support is through deeds rather than words. For example, supporting vote promotion efforts to encourage high voter turnout and to bolster observation to stem fraud would be enormously helpful.

PROS AND CONS OF BOLANOS SUPPORT

18. (C) On the subject of President Bolanos, Montealegre ventured that Bolanos can best support him through indirect means, out of the reach of the public eye. Bolanos himself is not popular, so a too-obvious endorsement could backfire, explained Montealegre. (Note: President Bolanos has been working behind the scenes to garner support for Montealegre, in talks with fellow Central American presidents and regional capital, as well as with Nicaraguan politicians and financiers. End Note.)

PRIVATE SECTOR CONTINUES TO HEDGE ITS BETS

19. (C) To Montealegre, the fear factor continues to work in Rizo's favor, as most of Nicaragua's risk-adverse financiers believe Rizo is a safer bet than Montealegre, and easier to manipulate. They also refuse to accept that Aleman is capable of handing Ortega the presidency in exchange for his

freedom. Despite their reluctance, however, following a recent meeting that he, Alvarado, and Rizo held with Nicaraguan capital, Nicaraguan business leaders have decided to contract a poll to determine whether Montealegre or Rizo draws the most support (reportedly they will use a Salvadoran polling firm). The poll could clear up their doubts, opined Montealegre. He ventured that ultimately, Nicaraguan capital might resort to the same tactic it has always employed, hedging its bets by supporting all candidates, even Ortega. (Note: This assessment coincides with what we are hearing from the private sector. End Note.)

FICKLE ALVARADO CONTINUES TO PLAY BOTH SIDES

110. (C) According to Montealegre, an unknown element is which way APRE presidential aspirant Jose Antonio Alvarado will swing -- towards Montealegre, or Rizo. Montealegre confirmed that he continues to negotiate with Alvarado, but Alvarado's demands are unreasonable, e.g., insisting that in addition to being his running mate, which Montealegre would accept, Alvarado seeks at least 12 National Assembly seats for his APRE followers -- an untenable proposition. Nonetheless, Montealegre was optimistic that ultimately Alvarado will side with him, noting that Aleman will at best offer Alvarado to serve as Nicaragua's ambassador to the United States. (Comment: Alvarado adviser Ariel Granera shared with us last week that if a broad Liberal alliance does not materialize, Alvarado will risk his fate with Montealegre. On April 25, Granera commented that negotiations between Alvarado and Montealegre continue and that Alvarado is inclined to run as the first Assembly deputy on Montealegre's ticket if he can persuade Montealegre to allow him enough Assembly seats for his supporters. End Comment.)

MIXED SIGNALS FROM NEIGHBORS

111. (C) Montealegre regretted that Salvadoran President Saca is risk adverse and believes Rizo is the safer bet. However, he was encouraged that Guatemalan President Berger favors Montealegre. According to Montealegre, Costa Rican President Arias is likely to tacitly endorse Ortega because Ortega has signaled to Arias that he will be "flexible" with Costa Rica

in its bid for greater access to the San Juan River.

MONTEALEGRE-HERTY POISED TO SIGN GOVERNANCE ACCORD

112. (C) Montealegre shared that his relations with Sandinista dissident Herty Lewites are generally positive and that they might sign a governance alliance shortly before November. He explained that if either candidate wins the presidency, the accord would commit both parties to collaborate on the other's governmental priorities.

THE CHAVEZ FACTOR

113. (C) To Montealegre, Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez's fertilizer, oil, and medical support initiatives are designed to help Ortega win the election, both in terms of drawing public sympathy and in channeling funds to Ortega's campaign. (Comment: On April 25, Montealegre commented to polcouns Chavez' televised attack against him during the April 25 oil cooperation signing ceremony between Chavez and 153 Nicaraguan mayors will play in Montealegre's favor. He explained that during the ceremony, Chavez defined Montealegre as Sandinista (FSLN) leader Daniel Ortega's presidential competitor, not Liberal Constitutional Party (PLC) candidate Jose Rizo. (Note: Chavez, who openly endorsed Ortega (exclaiming, "Daniel, how is the campaign going over there? I hope you win"), lambasted Montealegre after reading a La Prensa article featuring Montealegre's criticism of Chavez's interventionism in Nicaraguan affairs.)

14. (U) Participants:

Nicaragua:

Eduardo Montealegre

U.S.:

Deputy Assistant Secretary Kirsten Madison

Ambassador Paul Trivelli

USAID DAA Mike Magan

A/DCM Alex Dickie

Polcouns Victoria Alvarado (notetaker

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